Annex L: External and Internal Examiners

1. No University qualification shall be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. External Examiners are responsible to the Senate which authorises the award of qualifications.

2. The examination of theses should be by two or more examiners of whom at least one shall be an External Examiner. It may, on occasions, be appropriate to appoint two External Examiners (and no Internal Examiner) or two External Examiners and one Internal Examiner. Where this is the case, the reasons for this should be provided in an addendum to the appointment form. Two External Examiners must be appointed in cases where the candidate is also a member of staff.

3. Recommendations for the appointment of examiners should be submitted on the appropriate form along with a copy of the proposed External Examiner(s)'s CV. Once this form has been completed and signed by the Head of School it should be sent to the Faculties Support Office for scrutiny prior to approval by the Dean of the relevant Faculty. When the form has been signed by the Dean of the Faculty it should be sent to the Chair of the Graduate School Board for approval on behalf of Senate and Council.

4. In considering recommendations from Schools for the appointment of External Examiners, the following will be taken into account:

4.1. Only persons of appropriate seniority and/or experience in the fields covered by the programme of study (or parts thereof) who are able to command authority should be appointed. They should normally hold a post at Senior Lecturer level or above at an 'old' University or Principal Lecturer level or above at a 'new' University or equivalent. Persons who have recently retired from such posts may be considered for appointment provided that there is evidence that they are familiar with current expectations in UK higher education.

Where the proposed External is not of such seniority a note explaining the reasons for the proposal should be made on the recommendation form. The Chair of the Graduate School Board will not approve such a recommendation where the explanatory note simply relates to the excellence of the proposed External Examiner (this is to be expected as a matter of course).

The note should also indicate:

- The number of people in suitable seniority for appointment as External Examiner (in some cases this may, of course, be none in this country).

- If there are individuals of appropriate seniority who could be appointed, the reason(s) why such individuals were not being put forward for appointment should be given (this might be because such individuals had refused to accept appointment or were not available (e.g. illness or study leave away from the UK)).

4.2. Individuals should not be invited to become External Examiners if they have been employed by the University during the period of the student's registration.

4.3. The School must be satisfied that the nominee can demonstrate familiarity with the standard to be expected of students in order to achieve the award to be assessed.

4.4. The nominee must meet any applicable criteria set by relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
4.5. Occasionally individuals from outside higher education are proposed as External Examiners. This may be appropriate given the content of the thesis and/or the non-availability of a suitable person from higher education to act as an External Examiner. In all cases the information specified in points 3 and 4 above should be included with the appointment form together with an explanation of why the particular person had been put forward.

Where the proposed External has a civil service post/grading, his/her post details should include his/her grade (grade 7 (Principal Scientific Officer) is at senior lecturer/reader level and grade 6 (Senior Principal Scientific Officer) is at reader/professor level).

4.6. While most appointments as External Examiners are of individuals based in the UK the University’s procedures for the appointment of External Examiners do permit appointments from other EU countries. Appointments from outside the EU may be approved where this is the most appropriate given the content of the thesis and the non-availability of a suitable person from within the EU. The University’s budget for the appointment of External Examiners is limited so it is expected that non-UK Externals will be proposed only in a very small number of exceptional cases. The proposal of any External Examiner from outside the EU must be approved by the relevant Associate Dean (Graduate Studies).

The normal expectation is that the oral examination for a research degree will take place at the University at Kent. An oral examination will only be conducted elsewhere or by video link in exceptional circumstances when the candidate or External Examiner is at a distance from the University and unable to travel to the University at the appropriate time\(^1\) \(^2\).

Any External Examiners so appointed (from both the EU and further afield) must understand the requirements of a UK research degree and be familiar with our examination processes. In such circumstances the recommendation should be accompanied by a note explaining the reasons. (\textbf{Note: The University’s PhD regulations provide for an oral examination “unless specifically exempted from this requirement by the Board of the Faculty concerned”. This is and should be very unusual.})

4.7. Where there is one or more of the following conflicts of interest, a person may not be appointed as an External Examiner:

\begin{enumerate}
\item He or she is a member of a governing body or committee of University of Kent or one of its collaborative partners, or is a current employee of Kent or one of its collaborative partners. (N.B. an individual would not be excluded from becoming an External Examiner of a University of Kent research degree where he/she is or has been an External Examiner for a taught programme of study awarded by the University of Kent);
\item has a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with the supervisor or student;
\item is a former Kent staff member or student unless a period of three years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the nominee have completed their programme(s).
\end{enumerate}

5. When selecting an appropriate Internal Examiner, the School should ensure that he/she has evidence of research activity in the past five years. The Internal Examiner should normally have experience of supervising candidates as a supervisory chair, main

\(1\) See \url{https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/guidance/videolink.html} for guidance on oral examinations conducted by video link.

\(2\) Any expenditure incurred for vivas taking place outside the UK should be met by the School concerned.
supervisor or as part of a supervisory team. The Internal Examiner should have familiarity with the broad subject area of the thesis and be an existing member of University staff. In cases where honorary members of staff are proposed as Internal Examiners, a special case for the appointment must be made.

6. In considering the appointment of appropriate Internal and External Examiners, Schools should note that:

6.1. No member of the student's supervisory team (or any academic staff member who has been involved with supervising the research project) should be appointed as an examiner.

6.2. It would be exceptional to appoint as Internal (or External Examiner) researchers who have had a substantial direct involvement in the student's work or whose own work is the focus of the research project.

7. When considering the selection of an Internal and External Examiner, Schools should ensure that there is appropriate seniority, experience and expertise between the two examiners.

8. A research student is required to give the University two months’ notice of an intention to submit a thesis for examination. Ordinarily this should allow sufficient time for the appointment of examiners to be completed although, of course, occasionally this is not the case. However in no circumstances should a prospective examiner be given a copy of the thesis to be examined prior to his/her appointment being approved by the Chair of the Graduate School Board. Similarly in no circumstances should a viva examination of a candidate be held prior to the approval of the examiners by the Chair of the Graduate School Board.

9. The time taken to complete the scrutiny and approval processes outlined above can be minimised by following the advice outlined above and, in case of doubt, seeking advice from the Quality Assurance Office.

   The Faculties Support Office will scrutinise examiners’ appointment forms and, provided they are straightforward, they are passed on directly to the relevant Faculty Dean's Office (as per section 3 above). Forms will be dealt with promptly, however, any inaccuracies will inevitably cause delay. It is, therefore, in the interests of all concerned to ensure that forms reaching the Faculties Support Office are correct and complete.

10. After approval, examiners’ forms are returned to the Faculties Support Office for forwarding to the appropriate School. The School Administration Manager should then take appropriate action which will include:

10.1. Copying the form to the student’s supervisor and the Internal Examiner(s) (so that they know that the proposed examiners have been approved).

10.2. Writing to the External Examiner to confirm his/her appointment.

10.3. Letting the examiners have copies of the thesis and examiners’ report forms.

11. Where the Chair of the Graduate School Board is unable to approve the recommendation for examiners the form is returned to the Faculties Support Office who
will notify the supervisor immediately and return the form to the School Administration Manager.

12. By accepting the appointment, Examiners agree on a maximum timescale of three months for completion of the examination including the oral examination.

13. **Termination**

The University reserves the right to terminate the appointment of an External Examiner without notice where the Vice-Chancellor considers that the Examiner has not properly undertaken his/her duties.

14. **Independent Observers**

14.1 An Independent Observer would not normally be used at a research degree examination, but may be appointed by the Dean of the Faculty in the following circumstances:

- Where there are two External Examiners (and no Internal Examiner) appointed.
- Where the appointment of an Independent Observer (to oversee the process) is determined to be advisable.

14.2 The Independent Observer will not act as an examiner of the thesis. He or she will:

- oversee and maintain an independent record of the oral examination and assist the examiners in following University procedure;
- consider the reports from the examiners prior to the viva;
- hold a pre-meeting with the examiners to confirm how the viva will be coordinated and advise on procedures;
- introduce the examiners to the student at the beginning of the viva and explain the examination process;
- be present throughout the viva but not take an active role in questioning the student;
- ensure that the oral examination is conducted properly and according to good practice;
- be present while the examiners reach their decision, so as to be able to advise them on the options open to them under the University procedures;
- provide an independent view on the conduct of the examination (where required).

14.3 The Independent Observer will be a member of staff with substantial experience in examining research degrees who has not been involved with the student's research supervision, progression monitoring or examination at any stage during his/her period of registration. The Independent Observer will normally be appointed from outside the student's School.

**Further Guidance**

15 Under no circumstances should candidates contact their Internal or External Examiners, or any Independent Observer, about their research degree examination outside of the formal examination process. The School should make this clear to the candidate when the examiners are appointed.